

Notes and Communications

The Education Committee of the Toronto Area Archivists Group

by **DEBRA BARR**

In recent years, members of many Canadian archival associations and councils have remarked upon the scarcity of archival education programmes, and have responded by forming committees and developing plans. The Toronto Area Archivists Group is no exception. Although TAAG has sponsored many educational workshops and other events during the past sixteen years, in 1988 its executive recognized the need for a more systematic education programme, and called for a preliminary study.

During the 1970s and 1980s, TAAG sponsored a variety of workshops and courses, and a related organization, TAAG Education Foundation (established in 1985 to sponsor a disaster-preparedness symposium). The foundation's directors also operated a series of archives courses in conjunction with George Brown College in Toronto. In 1988, responsibility for the George Brown program was transferred back to TAAG itself, leaving the foundation free to focus on fundraising and other activities for which its charitable status is invaluable.

In turn, TAAG Executive formed an Education Committee to administer the college programme. The committee was also directed to study several surveys, reports and other background material (including the programme survey conducted by TAAG in 1987, the *Education Survey* conducted by the Ontario Association of Archivists in 1987¹, and the *ACA Strategic Planning Committee Report* released by the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) in 1988)², to examine their implications for TAAG, and to develop an education plan.

The Education Committee, consisting of Debra Barr, Linda Cobon, John Hardy, Robin Keirstead, Sharon Larade and Garron Wells, began with a study of TAAG's membership. It became clear that most of the 306 members of TAAG represent small archives/records management programs in church groups, colleges, businesses, museums, libraries, hospitals, and other organizations. Many members are part-time salaried employees and volunteers.³ In contrast, the *Association of Canadian Archivists Membership Directory (1987-88)*⁴ reveals that most of its 533 individual members are full-time employees in government (federal, provincial, regional, city, municipal), university, and sizable, well-established church and corporate archives. ACA members are primarily full-time professionals. The two constituencies are quite separate; most of the 306 members of TAAG cannot be counted among the 533 members of the ACA.

The Education Committee next studied TAAG's workshops and college courses. The workshop programme has evolved from the provision of introductory-level education concentrating on basic archival functions to a mixture of introductory and advanced-level education encompassing basic, administrative subjects, and other topics. During the past few years, TAAG has sponsored two or three workshops per year. They have generally been offered on weekends and have been well-attended. A very high percentage of workshop attendees have been TAAG members. While the workshops have been successful, in the past they have been planned on an *ad hoc* basis, in response to local needs.

The "Certificate in Archival Practices" programme at George Brown College has been in place since 1986. To qualify for a certificate, students are required to complete three compulsory courses, "Introduction to Archival Practices," "The Administration of Archives," and "The Care of Records (Conservation Techniques)," along with three electives from a series of records management courses co-sponsored by the college and the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA). A survey conducted by the Education Committee during December 1988 and January 1989 indicated that 15 of the 24 students who enrolled in the "Introduction to Archives" course (Fall 1988) were working as employees or volunteers in small archives/records management programs (three represented large archives, and six were not working in the archives/records management field); only three students were TAAG (as well as ACA) members when the course began; an additional three joined TAAG (but not the ACA) before the course ended; and nine of the ten students in the "Administration of Archives" course commencing in January had completed the "Introduction" course during the fall term. Survey respondents expressed some dissatisfaction with the Society of American Archivists' *Manuals* prescribed in the curriculum for the "Introduction to Archives" course.

Co-sponsorship of the programme by George Brown College has proven to be beneficial. Because academic institutions are subject to provincial government standards, are understood and sanctioned by the general community, maintain standards for instructors and students, implement procedures for administration of programmes, and provide continuity, the Education Committee concluded that certificate programmes can more appropriately be co-sponsored with an academic institution rather than be offered by an association directly.

The committee then turned to an examination of the roles of national and regional archival associations in the area of education. When TAAG was formed (informally during the early 1970s, formally in 1974), it was the first English-speaking archival association in Canada. For several years, its educational activities met needs not being addressed by other organizations. In recent years, however, numerous associations and councils have been formed. In Ontario, individual archivists are represented by the Bureau of Canadian Archivists, the Association of Canadian Archivists, and the Ontario Association of Archivists, and its several regional chapters (Eastern Ontario Archivists Association, London Area Archivists Group, Northern Ontario Archivists Association, Southwestern Ontario Archivists Association, and Toronto Area Archivists Group). Institutions in the province are represented by the Canadian Council of Archives and Ontario Council of Archives; and both individuals and institutions are served by the TAAG Education Foundation. Many of these organizations are in the process of developing education programs.

Given the proliferation of associations serving individual archivists, committee members agreed that the following questions should be addressed: "Which levels and forms of education should be provided by which associations?"; and "For whom should TAAG in particular be providing education?" The Bureau of Canadian Archivists, the Association of Canadian Archivists, and the Ontario Association of Archivists had already addressed the first question. The BCA's Needs Assessment Survey (1988) stated that:

professional development ... is mentioned in written comments and at regional meetings as a very high priority; [and] the future roles of the BCA will include ... the development of nationally significant education programmes.⁵

The ACA Strategic Planning Committee Report (May 1988) stated that:

the ACA's role is to ensure the needs of the experienced or professional archivist are met first ... The ACA should provide leadership and advanced education but the regional associations should provide the basic training so desperately needed by those working as volunteers or in small archives across Canada.⁶

A majority of respondents to the OAA survey (including representatives of the ACA, OAA, EOAA, SOAA, and TAAG, along with universities and colleges offering archives courses in history, library and museum programs) indicated that: i) professional archival education can best be provided in future by universities, and a Master of Archival Studies program should be established in central Canada; and ii) full-time technical education is needed and should be based in colleges. Respondents also agreed that archival associations should coordinate their activities in the area of continuing education to avoid duplication of effort; and it was suggested that professional-level continuing education can most appropriately be co-sponsored by universities, while non-professional continuing education can most appropriately be co-sponsored by colleges. Finally, it was proposed that: the ACA establish guidelines for professional (Master of Archival Studies), technical and other archival education programmes, and develop advanced-level workshops; and the OAA develop basic-level workshops. Members of the TAAG Education Committee agreed that TAAG, too, should concentrate on basic-level education.

Since their reports were released, all three organizations have moved ahead. With funding from the Canadian Council of Archives, the BCA (through its Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards) hired a consultant to develop an education plan, and a co-ordinated series of advanced-level workshops on descriptive standards has been recommended. The ACA Education Committee is developing guidelines for the variety of introductory, continuing and specialist programmes which could be sponsored by archival associations, councils and institutions. In addition, it is developing a five-year plan, and has prepared revised guidelines for Master of Archival Studies programmes. The OAA Education Committee has developed a proposal for a series of standard introductory-level workshops, addressing both content and procedures.

Finally, the TAAG Education Committee addressed the roles of universities and colleges. In Ontario, full-time professional education programmes are generally offered at the post-graduate level in universities, whereas colleges house full-time technical programmes along with part-time programmes of general community interest. The TAAG/ George Brown College programme is a part-time general interest rather than a full-time technical programme. The only entrance requirement for the first course in the programme, "Introduction to Archival Practices," is Grade 12 English-language equivalency. The goal of the programme, clearly, should not be to attempt to provide professional education, nor thorough technical education.

In May 1989, the Education Committee submitted a preliminary education plan to the TAAG executive, with the following recommendations:

because TAAG's membership includes representatives of small archives/ records management programmes who are not members of the ACA, a TAAG education programme should be designed primarily (but not exclusively) to serve these unique constituents;

in light of the reports of the BCA, ACA, and OAA cited above, it would be appropriate for TAAG (in co-operation with the OAA) to concentrate on developing introductory-level education programmes for those of its members who are not full-time professional archivists working in well-established institutions, and to leave the development of advanced-level education to the ACA and BCA, unless those associations fail to develop continuing and specialist programmes;

TAAG Education Committee and TAAG Program Committee should offer a more systematic workshop programme, in conjunction with the BCA, ACA, and OAA;

TAAG should indicate a willingness to host professional-level workshops in co-operation with the ACA and BCA;

if the OAA implements an introductory-level workshop programme, TAAG should co-operate by hosting workshops in the Toronto area, and in some cases should offer to assist with the development of the standardized workshops in the series;

additional study of the curricula, the students and other elements of the TAAG/George Brown College programme should be conducted;

some elements of the courses presently being offered in the TAAG/George Brown College programme may be inappropriate at the college level, and the calendar descriptions and curricula should be reviewed and revised accordingly;

TAAG should be prepared to enhance those elements of the George Brown College programme that are in keeping with the elements proposed in the forthcoming ACA guidelines for introductory, continuing, and specialist programmes;

the establishment of an archives administration programme based at a university should be considered in cooperation with the OAA and ACA;

TAAG should remain informed of the educational activities of other archival organizations and be prepared to develop its own plans in cooperation with those organizations.

Recently TAAG was awarded funding by the Canadian Council of Archives (Professional Development and Training Co-operative Programme) to assist with the redevelopment of courses in the George Brown College curricula. Under the terms of the grant, a consultant may be hired on a short-term basis during the latter half of 1989 to study existing curricula and to recommend revisions. Both the consultant's report and the TAAG Education Committee's preliminary report will be useful in developing long-term objectives likely to result in the availability of more — and more systematic — archival education.

Notes

- 1 Ontario Association of Archivists, *Education Survey* (November, 1987).
- 2 Association of Canadian Archivists, *ACA Strategic Planning Committee Report: Planning for the Future* (May, 1988).
- 3 A study of the individual membership (1988-89) conducted in conjunction with Jill Ten Cate (TAAG Membership Co-ordinator) indicated that 49% represented small archives and 31% represented large archives. Affiliation was not known for the remaining 20%. Institutional memberships reflected an even higher percentage of small archives.
- 4 Association of Canadian Archivists, *Association of Canadian Archivists Membership Directory, 1987-88* (1988).
- 5 Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Report of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists Needs Assessment Survey* (1988), pp. 2, 3.
- 6 *ACA Strategic Planning Committee Report*; executive summary.